

THE QUEEN

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A WOMAN'S WORK FOR EDUCATION

The Story of a Great Movement

MISS CHARLOTTE M. MASON, a record of whose life-work has just been published, will rank among the half-a-dozen or so outstanding women of the last century who have left a permanent mark on the history of our country. She had, says Sir Michael Sadler, "a genius for education," and in addition a marvellous power of inspiring others not only with her own fine ideals but with the determination to put her educational aims and principles into practice.

These principles were stated by Miss Mason very simply in the last address she gave in 1922, a few months before her death, at a Conference of the Parents' National Educational Union, a society founded by her as long ago as 1887. "Let us think of our society," she said then, "as one of the 'Services,' that is, to the State; an ideal we all feel after. . . . What can we do? Absolutely the first service to the State is to present it with good citizens."

What are the qualities that go to make a good citizen, and how far does a P.N.E.U. child exhibit them? Miss Mason answered her question by stating that integrity, absence of self-consciousness, self-control, vanity; unconscious obedience, singleness of purpose, and move, intense absolute attention—that is, concentration; these were the qualities aimed at by the education given in the P.N.E.U. Schools. She claimed that the "infinite power of attention in every child" was a discovery of her society which became the basis of her educational methods.

Culture—a liberal education—was the object aimed at, and she believed this was attained, by the study of literature, art and nature. "Mind, capable of dealing with knowledge in its three aspects, knowledge of God, knowledge of man, knowledge of the natural world, science, mind in this sense appears to be a universal possession and everyone should have the joy and the manifold interest that such knowledge affords." She did not aim at producing the specialist, but the all-round intelligent human being such as the great educators desired, with, however, the religious and ethical factors always in the forefront. Through the study of the Humanities the pupils gained a first-hand knowledge of some of the best things that have been often neglected; they learnt to study by themselves and discovered long before the Dalton Plan the joy of original work, of research work. "No secondary motive, marks, prizes, places or the like is required; children work with joy for the pure love of knowledge."

The Parent as Educator

PERHAPS the greatest service Miss Mason did for education was to enlist the co-operation of the parent and to insist upon the value and importance of the home. The tributes paid by parents to the personal help received from this remarkable woman, who, from the House of Education at Amblede, directed and inspired a network of operations all over England, is evidence of the wonderful and widespread nature of her influence. Yet she was the enemy of all red-tape, and set little store on organisation which, as it becomes more perfect, tends to the mechanical and the loss of the personal individual element.

In proportion as a piece of work needs organisation it lacks life, she would often say. "Don't make schemes for arranging the school work ahead of time. It must be fresh term by term or it will get stale." As long ago as 1888, in a pamphlet setting forth the aims and ideals of the P.N.E.U., we find these wise words: "No other part of the world's work is of such supreme difficulty, delicacy and importance, as that of parents in the right bringing-up of their children. The first obligation of the parent—that of passing forward a generation better than ourselves—rests with parents. . . . Yet parents with the responsibility of the world's future resting upon them are left to do their work, each father and mother alone, rarely getting so much of sympathy, counsel or encouragement." It was to give parents the benefit of her own experience, so that the experience and wisdom of each might profit all, that this new society was formed.

A father of children brought up in a Parents' Union Schoolroom bears testimony to the joy which Miss Mason's training brought to both parents and children. "The whole training," she says, "seems to invite a close companionship between parents and children through the influence of . . . thus the interest which parents and children take in each other's lives is largely due to Miss Mason's influence in teaching us as parents to regard our children, from earliest babyhood, as persons with their own individuality of their own, and are to be treated as such, with gratitude and joy the days, eighteen or nineteen years ago, when as a young mother I started to teach my small boys, with the help of the P.N.E.U. School. She tells the delightful syllabuses sent her from headquarters of the delightful books to be read, of the advice given. 'Others will write of Miss Mason's influence on the child as a trained teacher, but how much greater is the delicate influence of the mother. . . . It was she who realised what home education home schoolroom, who inspired us for our work and gave us the power to carry it out.'"

The Democratic Vision

MISS MASON'S work began with the parents and the children of the more insured classes, but liberal-minded and progressive as she was, and quick to realise the needs of the age, she desired to see her principles extended to the children of workers. In her last public utterance she said: "What is wanted is a democratic education."

* In "Memorium," Charlotte M. Mason, Parents' National Educational Union.

include not only the fit, the aristocracy of mind, high and low, rich and poor, but everybody. And now we of the P.N.E.U. are in a position to state that while an academic education will, of necessity, reach only the fit and the few, the humanities in English meet a general appeal." A most interesting description is given in this book of memories of an elementary school on the Yorkshire coast, where Miss Mason's idea of supplying children from the earliest age with really good literature proved a great success; and it is remarkable that this democratic development, which only dates from 1915, has taken root in 175 elementary schools, the teachers in which are enthusiastic over the syllabuses supplied from headquarters, while the children love the books and pictures which have opened up a new and beautiful world to them.

This book is the record of a wonderful woman, whose life-work should be studied by parents and teachers alike. In an age of educational fads and fashions Miss Mason's sanity of view, her broad liberal outlook, and her profound knowledge of children are a tonic and a refreshment. She was an idealist and at the moment idealism is discredited in some high quarters; nevertheless, in spite of a great lack of authority, recent dicta, all the great things in the world that were really worth doing have been inspired by the idealists.



MISS C. MASON

By Fred Tuke

INTERESTING ART COMPETITIONS

THE Royal Society of Arts is to be congratulated on its enterprise in formulating a scheme to encourage the study of design for industrial purposes. It has decided to hold annual competitions, the first of which will take place in June, 1924, and will be open to two classes of competitors, students in British Schools of Art, and all Misses. Cadbury offer a Travelling Scholarship, my copy for a poster, an illustration for the Press, or a picture design for a box-lid, and Messrs. Fry give a series of prizes of £10 and £25 for designs for chocolate boxes. If by means of these competitions the work of clever young art students can be adapted to industrial purposes the Society of Arts will have done real service to the country. All particulars may be obtained from the Secretary of the society, John Street, Adelphi, W.C. 2.

The Oxford University Press, encouraged by the success of its recent Poster Exhibition by schoolgirls, has now arranged a drawing competition among girls' schools. Competitors, who must be under seventeen years of age, are asked to produce a coloured drawing suitable for an advertisement of "Oxford Books for Boys and Girls." Professor William Robertson, Principal of the Royal College of Art, South Kensington, will act as judge, and the prizes are so arranged that both the school which produced the successful competitor and the latter will benefit by the award.

Some interesting dramatic performances have recently been given in the schools which show that a high standard is aimed at in the study of literature and the drama, and that much dramatic talent exists among our boys and girls. At Tonbridge School an excellent performance was given

of the "Merry Wives of Windsor," under the direction of Miss Clemence Dane and Mr. W. Arnold, the actors being scholars of the school. Four performances of "Hamlet," a difficult part for schoolboys, were imagined beforehand, an almost impossible task for school boys, were given at Workshop College, where bore evidence and to the real enjoyment of the tragedy. Students at the Birkbeck College, London, celebrated the centenary of the educational institution, now a college of the University of London, by an admirable rendering of that rarely-acted and strong Elizabethan tragedy, "Arden of Feversham." FLORENCE B. LOW.

THE FIRST LESSONS

THE War familiarised everyone with the term *liaison* officer, and most people with the importance of the work entrusted to the individuals so designated. It seems to me that something analogous is found in the education of a child; for although, using the term in its restricted, technical sense (education widely considered should start with life in the world, I suppose), the work of the educator begins when school or schoolroom is entered, the years of babyhood which precede that epoch have their own bearing upon the subject. To-day, therefore, I am considering the position of the *liaison* officer between the parent, who must be regarded as the schoolroom, and that of the nursery; and it is, perhaps, almost more by letters received in that department than in this that these words are suggested.

The value of early teaching is a matter much debated among educationalists, and one on which there is a great diversity of opinion. It is often confused in issue with various other considerations, too, with the result that there is less clear thinking in connection with it than in other phases of a child's life. Most of us who have any knowledge of the children of the poor, for instance, deplore deeply the impossibility to further the work of education at any rate of the nursery schools, which owe their inception and perfecting to Miss Margaret Macmillan. But when we come to analyse this regret, we find that many factors which are not actually those of education as the schools regard it are at work. The toddlers who could be gathered into these schools would be taken from already over-crowded dwellings and from the streets, safeguarded physically, and allowed to gain lessons in order and discipline which, otherwise, they would never make acquaintance with. They would still be under medical observation, too, instead of passing at two years old or so from the care of the baby clinic, to spend three, four, or even five years in the hands of a doctor, again under the inspection of the school doctor—years fraught with any number of dangerous possibilities. But these are considerations which have little to do with education, again in the restricted sense which has its rightful place on this page. In the case of children more fortunately placed in the world, something of the same extraneous reasoning holds good. The kindergarten and baby school are most valuable in numberless households, into which the ordinary routine of nursery and schoolroom does not enter. They provide for the care of children during many hours of the day, taking them out of flats and small houses, and leaving mothers and servants free from the responsibilities which would otherwise have to be provided for. Again, such schools provide what is often so much needed for such children—the companionship of their peers, with the lesson of give-and-take, as well as the joy of communal existence, which it brings. But here, again, we are apart from education proper and simple, although, obviously, this, in the manner best suited to the age of the child and under the care of a specialist, goes hand in hand with the other advantages in such schools, whether for rich or poor.

But when we boil the matter down to its simplest consideration of what does matter, I do not think these early days—say, before the seventh birthday—matter very much. Matter is that some reasonable effort is made even when matter is so little into the right attitude of mind to receive the serious matter of education when the time comes. To let a little thing run wild until six or seven, and then attempt to transplant it to the schoolroom with all its restrictions is to place a serious handicap upon it. Long before that—about five years old, indeed—children should begin to grow accustomed to "lessons" if only for ten minutes every morning; and these are best when taking the form of the manual exercises of which I have said so much. But it is not so much what it learns to do, as the fact that it is learning, at definite time and place, which is of value. Children very immature at that age as well as later on, learn to pick out their letters, stringing them into words, learning to count, and so on. Others find little inclination in sitting down to a lesson, but a small natural inclination in some children is the serious matter of companions. But it is a great help in the given matter of education when the bent towards it has been given matter the baby days laid, if observed with attention have been cultivated, whether of mind and body, immature as these necessarily may be. Memory is a faculty which is developed too, too, too early days, and can do so without the least forcing, which cannot be too much deprecated in every direction. And the growth of reading, which may well be laid, if only because they are so much more easily mastered at a very early age than later.